

**00398**

**c. 1961/04/00**

## POLITICAL POINTS

1. It should be understood that we are talking about contingencies and not a decided course of action in the military field. We have felt that one of the great errors in these matters is in treating the military <sup>+ political</sup> fields of action as separable. We have been trying to conduct our affairs with ~~military~~ awareness of both fields of action.
2. We had thought that this connection was completely clear to the British Government, most especially in the conversation the Secretary of State had with the British and French Ambassadors on March 21st, in which he outlined the two parts, political and military. We had thought that in that conversation it was clearly understood that our endorsement of the British proposals to Moscow, <sup>about</sup> many portions ~~about~~ of which we had considerable doubts, was on the understanding that if this attempt failed, either through Russian refusal to join with the British in requesting a cease fire or through obvious delaying tactics on their part, that we would stand together in the military measures necessary and suitable to prevent a Communist takeover in Laos. We had also assumed that it was understood that our common membership in SEATO would provide the appropriate first locus for such a military effort.
3. <sup>PM's</sup> ~~Your~~ letter to ~~me~~ has raised a number of doubts ~~in my mind~~ as to whether this understanding was as clear on <sup>his</sup> your side as it was on ours. In particular, it is quite unclear whether the British Government now intends anything more than moral approval of defensive action by others in an area which is of the greatest common concern. (Can the British really believe that, if there are ~~now~~ grounds for SEATO action, there is a good case for unilateral intervention by some one other power?)  
  
And if you really want to drive this home you may want to talk to the Prime Minister alone ~~with~~ the Secretary's cable in your hands.
4. The Prime Minister makes quite a point of "clearing <sup>with</sup> the Commonwealth". Does he really suppose that at a pinch the position of the Australians and Pakistani would be as negative as the one suggested in his letter?

## Political Notes (Continued)

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5. (Certainly for private conversation only): "Do you believe that confidence in any collective security organization can really be maintained if ~~when~~ one of which we are both members is abandoned?"

Does the Prime Minister understand that a failure to act under treaty obligations, if action is necessary, would most gravely undermine the premise of collective security upon which our defenses are based all over the world -- and most conspicuously in the Atlantic area itself? Does he understand how American opinion would read a British abstention, if a test is forced?

6. Does he realize how much latent isolationism there is in the United States?

Does he understand how easy it would be for American opinion to ~~form~~ <sup>move from</sup> commitments to collective security toward a motion of fortress America?

7. Either before or after administering this medicine, it will be important to point out that we are not thinking of an immediate large scale intervention by ~~major~~ troop units. Unless the situation rapidly deteriorates, we are thinking rather of the sort of military measures which are outlined in the military appendix. We would like to have the Prime Minister's support in these actions even without formal participation or a SEATO vote.

We do not see how there can be negotiations while our military position continues to deteriorate. Does the Prime Minister agree?

8. When the conversation turns to possible terms of <sup>truce</sup> ~~troops~~, we will be on quite uncertain ground, and you may not want to say too much. The Prime Minister is quite likely to want to know whether we will accept Pathet Lao participation in a new government, and we see no reason to make a commitment on this point. Our response might be that what we hope for here is a full consultation and the highest possible measure of agreement between our country and the other allied participants.

It may be worth suggesting that a sound bargaining position is to talk and act in terms of self-determination, under appropriate safeguards, by the people of Laos themselves.

## Political Points (Continued)

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9. You will want to consider very carefully how far to indicate possible willingness to accept ~~Su~~Wanna as a major figure in a reconstituted government -- if you can avoid it, it will probably be better not to get into this one ~~in~~ on this occasion, though in fact S. will clearly be very important - and possibly central, even from our standpoint.
10. A key question is likely to be whether we really mean what we say about a cessation of hostilities before a conference. To most of your advisers the position we now occupy represents a very substantial concession toward British views which we do not ~~really~~ share. Yet there will be a certain plausibility if the Prime Minister seeks to test your views of a possible agreement to a conference ~~with~~ an immediate cease fire as an immediate result. The point that you must consider here is whether further slippage in our position would not be very dangerous from the point of view of our relations with governments which trust us in Asia and very dangerous also in future negotiations where it will be believed that our position is always flexible. If the British take away from this meeting the sense of your resolution on this point, we can be certain that their impression will be effectively communicated to the Soviet Union. This is a mild version of what Chip would tell you, and as our military <sup>note</sup> suggests, you are by no means in a position where you should appear to want a conference at any price. Indeed a great many people would like to see what would happen if appropriate parts of the Millpond plan were put into effect.

m.f. B.